



bizarre *giant prickly pear cacti*. En route you can also observe endemic *marine iguanas*, the evolutionary miraculous 'dragons of Galapagos'. Walk at a short distance past nesting *frigatebirds* and *blue-footed boobies*, *red-footed* and *Nazca boobies*, whilst courtshipping, mating, breeding, nurturing or learning to fly (depending on the season).

Though less frequented than popular central and south-eastern islands, the barren north offers most dramatic landscapes and reveals the first chapter of evolution. Discover how pioneer species conquer barren lava fields and create habitats for new colonist species. Furthermore, en route you will have chances to see emblematic and endemic *Galapagos penguins close to the equator!* In the contrasting lush highlands of Santa Cruz you will encounter the famous *Galapagos giant tortoises*. You will also learn more about their successful captured breeding programmes.

#### **Important notes:**

- Itinerary is subject to change in case of force majeure caused by exceptional and natural circumstances.
  - Approximate departure and navigation times are just indicative and depend on the sea conditions and decisions of the captain.
  - Although the Galapagos seldom require you to seek out wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.
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## **Day 1 – Friday**

**Upon arrival at Baltra your tour will start on the adjacent main island of Santa Cruz, where you will cross the surprisingly lush highlands by bus and reach its cosy harbour town of Puerto Ayora. A visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the famous *Galapagos giant tortoise* breeding centre is an interesting introduction to this unique archipelago. There is also free time to relax in cosy Puerto Ayora.**

#### **Programme:**

**AM:** This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport.

**PM:** After being welcomed aboard S/C Nemo I, check-in, lunch, and the safety-drill you will visit the Charles Darwin Research Station as an introduction to Galapagos and get some free time to stroll through the cosy town of Puerto Ayora.

**Overnight navigation:** Short before midnight the anchor will be lifted for this route's longest navigation to easternmost Pitt Point, about 8 hours in eastern direction.

#### **AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport**

At Baltra Airport you will have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. See [Getting there](#) for flight and arrival information.

In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and the airport shuttle will transfer you to the ferry across the Itabaca Channel. On Santa Cruz you continue by bus through the lush highlands to the harbour of Puerto Ayora. Our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

#### **PM: Charles Darwin Research Station (Santa Cruz)**

The Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) and the headquarters of the Galapagos National Park Service share the same location on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora. From here biological research and indispensable conservation management of this unique archipelago are directed. The complex

houses several interpretation and information centres about the National Park and the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

The most memorable part of your visit will probably be the successful breeding centre and the enclosures with *Galapagos giant tortoises*; even after the death of its world-famous resident, 'Lonesome George' († June 2012; the last known individual of the *Pinta subspecies*, who sadly failed to reproduce offspring). Most remaining adult *giant tortoises* in the corals are former pets and many of them are accustomed to human company.

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## Day 2 – Saturday

The longest nocturnal passage of this route will bring you to Pitt Point, the extreme eastern cape of San Cristóbal (and of the entire archipelago). On top of these eroded cliffs you can find *blue-footed*, *red-footed* and *Nazca boobies* breeding together, and also *frigate birds* with bright red, balloon-sized pouches in the mating season! You will land in a bachelor's colony of *Galapagos sea lions*, and stroll along a cute nursery colony at the scenic beach below Witch Hill in the afternoon.

### Programme:

**AM:** After breakfast you will make a wet landing at Pitt Point, from where you will hike to the clifftop seabird colonies (and back). After that snorkelling is scheduled.

**PM:** During lunch we will navigate along the shore of San Cristóbal to Witch Hill, where various activities can be undertaken: a dinghy-ride, sea kayaking, snorkelling and a beach stroll.

**Overnight navigation:** This evening we will sail to Santa Fe (4 hrs west), where you can enjoy a comfortable night rest in a sheltered bay.

### **AM: Pitt Point (San Cristóbal)**

Two wind sculptured tuff cones at Pitt Point constitute the easternmost point of San Cristóbal, and thus of the archipelago as well. These cliffs were the first sight of land when HMS Beagle and Charles Darwin arrived on September 15th 1835. On the small green sand beach, you will be welcomed by a cacophony of barking *Galapagos sea lions*. This is a bachelor colony, where males usually recuperate from and prepare themselves for fighting and mating.

From the *saltbush* and spiny shrubs behind the beach, a trail leads up to an area of tropical dry forest vegetation - most of the year leafless *palo santo* trees, *yellow cordia* shrubs, tiny *prickly pear cacti* and *carpetweed* - that turns red in the dry season. After the pretty steep climb through a gully to the cliff top, you can wander around the only colony on the Galapagos that is home to all three species of booby: *blue-footed*, *red-footed* and *Nazca booby*; as well as both species of *frigatebird* (*great* and *magnificent*), famous because of their scarlet balloon-sized pouches during mating season. *Frigatebirds* prefer to attack returning *boobies* and conduct aerial battles rather than fishing themselves and getting wet.

### **PM: Witch Hill (San Cristóbal)**

To scout out the dangerous reefs, in 1835 HMS Beagle's Captain FitzRoy climbed to the top of the obvious tuff-cone that overlooks this scenic bay. Nowadays it is called Witch Hill and is no longer the main attraction of this site, but part of its romantic coastal panorama. Let your eyes travel from the volcanic cone, over the turquoise bay to the razor-sharp contours of Kicker Rock on the horizon, one of the photogenic landmarks of the Galapagos.

You can walk about 1km/0.6mi along the romantic, crescent-shaped beach and feel the soft and powdery white coral sand on your feet (it is actually pulverised by *parrot fish*, that destruct living coral reefs). Enjoy the *Galapagos sea lion* rookery with its cute babies, or study the rich intertidal and bird life (mainly *brown pelicans*, *blue-footed boobies* and *swallow-tailed gulls*). Behind the beach and the

narrow stretch of dunes, there is a dark lava tongue with several saline lakes that used to be a local salt mine (necessary for the conservation of fish). Here you can find some *coastal* and *wading* birds such as the *great blue heron*.

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### Day 3 – Sunday

Heading back towards the heart of the archipelago you will visit the extraordinary Santa Fe and not to be missed South Plaza that belongs to the most popular sites. Below the bizarre *giant prickly pear cacti* you will encounter characteristic *land iguanas*. Although this 'Jurassic islet' is different to every other site in the National Park, at the same time it is so typically Galapagos with its sharp contrasts, amazing diversity and stunning concentration of wildlife. While sailing along Santa Cruz we will be on the look-out for *whales*.

#### **Programme:**

**AM:** After breakfast you will take a guided walk from the beach of Santa Fe (wet landing). Your guide will decide whether to follow the easy shorter circuit or a strenuous longer hike inland (moderate level; about 3km/2mi). Don't forget to save some energy for excellent swimming or snorkelling opportunities in the crystal-clear azure waters of Barrington Bay.

**PM:** Around lunchtime we will proceed to South Plaza (about 2 hrs northwest), possibly escorted by *bottle nose dolphins*. You will take an unforgettable guided walk on this Jurassic islet (easy level; about 1.25 km/0.75 mi; avoidable depths on the cliff-edge).

**Navigation:** While navigating to Black Turtle Cove (2 hrs, before dinner and sunset) we will have opportunities for some great *whale* watching. After dinner you can enjoy a relatively quiet floating sleep.

**Additional options scuba-diving:** Gordon Rocks (Expert/Advanced) or Santa Fe (All levels).

#### **AM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)**

Practically every animal on Santa Fe is unique; endemic to the Galapagos, or even to this island alone and extremely vulnerable! This extraordinary island is remnant of probably the most ancient volcano on the Galapagos, and gave evolution enough time and isolation to create its wonders.

Your experience starts before even anchoring, when the contours of its bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus (opuntia)* forests become distinguishable. These largest *cacti* of the islands have extremely thick trunks, and can grow over 10m/33ft tall! You will land right in the middle of a *Galapagos sea lion* colony on the beach. From their outlooks at the beach ridge surprisingly fearless *Galapagos hawks* are ready to snatch away a *lava lizard*; not worrying that even these are unique...

Almost every visitor of Santa Fe becomes eager to get a glimpse of the rare *Barrington land iguana*. But this pale endemic version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. This one is more of a quest to find (rather untypical to the Galapagos); other times it surprises you by waiting for you next to the trail. Whether you spot it, or not, you will keep going from one surprise to the next.

While snorkelling in the azure coloured Barrington Bay between tropical *reef fish*, maybe a curious *Galapagos sea lion* will be willing to play with you!

#### **PM: South Plaza**

The south of both Plaza islets is the best place to encounter endemic *Galapagos land iguanas*. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them whilst distracted by the equally bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus-trees*! These *iguanas* are not only ugly as Darwin pronounced, but also very patient and photogenic models with strikingly saffron colours. Overpopulation and severe food competition have

affected their smaller size. It is incredible to see how *cactus* spines don't harm them while chewing pads, flowers and fruits. You should also look out for some unique hybrids between a male *marine iguana* and a female *land iguana*.

Arriving at the upper rim, you get to know the other, wild and windy face of South Plaza that provides a complete different habitat. About 20m/75ft downwards impressively droning waves splash against the foot of massive cliffs. Being talented rock climbers, sun basking *marine iguanas* have escaped the cool shadows of the wall. Clouds of *petrels*, *storm petrels*, *shearwaters* and *brown noddies* make spectacular flights and sometimes appear to walk on the waves. Take your binoculars and don't miss the *red-billed tropicbird* with its graceful long tail and spectacular mating fights. These cliffs are also a nesting place for the endemic *swallow-tailed gull*, the most beautiful *gull* in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits.

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## Day 4 – Monday

**This morning you will explore the evergreen mangle forest of Black Turtle Cove, and feel as if you are in the Amazon rainforest instead of on the north coast of Santa Cruz. These lagoons and adventurous creeks teem with *marine* and *birdlife*, and (seasonally) with mating *turtles* and *sharks*. Nearby North Seymour is one of the most visited sites. This tabletop islet is overloaded with the most extensive colonies of *frigatebirds* and *blue-footed boobies* in the archipelago, and there crawl *Galapagos land iguanas* around as well!**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** Shortly after your wake-up call and a snack you will leave for this dinghy-ride.

**PM:** Make a landing at North Seymour for a guided walk through the large seabird's colonies, following a circular loop (easy level; 2km/1.25 mi/about 2hrs).

**Navigation:** About midnight we will lift the anchor and sail to Genovesa. Depending on the sea conditions we will navigate about 5:30 hrs north.

### **AM: Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz)**

The ancient mangle at Black Turtle Cove has grown out to forest proportions and forms the backdrop for a distinct adventure. You might even feel as if you are in the Amazon rainforest instead of close to the sea; though on a closer look vegetation mainly exists of *red mangroves* with characteristic aerial roots that let them survive in salty and brackish water. By inflatable dinghy we will explore the calm emerald lagoon and enter the surrounding shallow creeks of these salt-water marshes. The outboard engine is sometimes turned off, so that you can enjoy the ambience at its fullest. You have to keep your eyes peeled when looking around and staring into the crystal clear waters to observe all the life that is flying and swimming around.

You can spot silently hunting lava herons on the banks and brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves. Various species of ray and shark come to this nutritious cradle to give birth; *scalloped hammerhead sharks* come back to the place where they're born and their babies tend to be close to the surface. *Pacific green turtles* (*black turtles* was their former name) visit this cove in their reproduction season (November-January); if you're lucky you can catch them mating on the surface! Afterwards their eggs are deposited on coral sand beaches along this north-western coastline of Santa Cruz.

### **PM: North Seymour**

The tabletop islet of North Seymour is an uplifted part of the seabed. Between the dry shrubs you might spot a *Galapagos land iguana*. North Seymour did not originally have *land iguanas*, but in the 1930s an eccentric American millionaire moved the last generation from Baltra, and saved them from starvation caused by competition with introduced goats; the breeding programme at Charles Darwin Research Station that followed turned into a big success.

You can spot lots of seabirds, such as *brown pelicans*, *red-billed tropicbirds*, endemic *swallow-tailed gulls* and seasonally even *Nazca boobies*, but the main attraction are the archipelago's most extensive breeding colonies of *blue-footed boobies* and *frigatebirds*. At the start of the breeding season (shifting on our calendar) adult *frigatebird*-males blow up their vivid red pouches to impressive football-sized balloons. This is one of the few spots (besides Genovesa and Pitt Point) where you can compare the *magnificent* and the rarer *great frigatebird* breeding next to each other. *Frigatebirds* prefer to attack returning *boobies* and conduct aerial battles rather than fishing themselves and getting wet. The even more popular *blue-footed boobies* show their cute courtship rituals, in which their remarkable feet play an important role.

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## Day 5 – Tuesday

**As one of the outer islands and the most exclusive places of the Galapagos, Genovesa is well worth last night's longer navigation. All impressions will be nearly too much for a single day! Hundreds of thousands of seabirds perch and nest on the cliffs around its flooded crater. Not only because of its historical English name (Tower) Genovesa has a royal touch. Follow in the footsteps of Prince Philip – Galapagos lover for many years and patron of the Charles Darwin Foundation – and visit this favourite birding spot with largest breeding colonies of red-footed and Nazca boobies, and look for a remarkable short-eared owl that hunts on foot!**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** Today's full programme includes two longer walks, snorkelling and optional sea kayaking. After an early breakfast and a wet landing at the sheltered beach of Darwin Bay you will go for a guided walk (moderate level; about 3km/2mi). Enjoy a snack aboard before snorkelling (alternatively: sea kayaking).

**PM:** Around lunch-time we will sail to nearby Prince Philip's Steps, close to the entrance of the broken caldera. There you will take a guided walk through cliff top *seabird* colonies (moderate level; about 3km/2mi).

**Overnight navigation:** Nemo I will lift the anchor short after dinner, and navigate about 5 hours, heading back south in the direction of Santiago (and anchoring at Bartolomé).

### **AM: Darwin Bay (Genovesa)**

Genovesa's horseshoe shaped wall is unmistakable proof that we have anchored inside the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a submarine volcano! The visitor's site named Darwin Bay is located at the very rear. This compact site shows the extreme varied coastal ecosystems of the Galapagos in miniature. The trail starts from the coral sand beach and subsequently passes a zone with *saltbushes* and *mangroves*, then crosses tidal creeks and barren lava formations, dry shrub lands, and finally turns on the ridge of some cliffs.

In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (preferred habitat) without disturbing others. *Whimbrels* and *wandering tattlers* forage actively along the surf, next to resting *Galapagos sea lions*. *Hérons* wait motionlessly at the tidal pools. Impressive *frigatebirds* (both *great* and *magnificent* species) and *red-footed boobies* nest in

the *mangroves*, where you can also hear some vocalists such as *yellow warblers*, *Darwin's finches* and *Galapagos mockingbirds*. What's unique is that two subpopulations of the same species of *large cactus finch* differ in their singing.

*Tropicbirds*, *Nazca boobies*, *storm petrels*, endemic *lava-* and *swallow-tailed gulls* soar along the cliffs. When you already have seen *marine iguanas* elsewhere, the small Genovesa species might not look too impressive, but consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeded to reach and survive on this remote, upstream island (and have become endemic to this island).

### **PM: Prince Phillip's Steps (Genovesa)**

Before landing you will take a dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the 25m/80ft high walls become overwhelming, and will give you a better impression of the dimensions of this crater. Sometimes a *Galapagos fur seal* will be resting on one of the shaded ledges. Although there are also *seabirds*, the real spectacle will take place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

You will therefore have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of *palo santo* shrubs on top. Tropical dry forest vegetation appears dead during most months of the year, but just drops its leaves to prevent drying out by evaporation. It's a threatened ecosystem. *Red-footed boobies* with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; different to their blue-footed relatives 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

At the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy wide views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless *seabirds*. Following the exposed rim you will first pass a colony of *Nazca boobies* and finally reach the extensive *storm petrel* nesting places, where you might be lucky enough to spot how the well-camouflaged *short-eared owl* hunts for them on foot!

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## **Day 6 – Wednesday**

**Just out of the coast of Santiago, Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will anchor at two volcanoes islets: Bartolomé (recently born out of fire) and Chinese Hat. You will arrive exactly on time at Chinese Hat to witness how this barren volcano islet gets colonised by pioneer species and begins to sprout! Enjoy the famous wild romantic panorama of Bartolomé. Very close to the equator you will have your first opportunities to meet endangered *Galapagos penguins*; whilst snorkelling you might even encounter these agile hunters fishing!**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** Today's full programme is largely dedicated to volcanism. Wake up during an early morning dinghy-ride along the barren shoreline. After breakfast it is not yet too hot to climb the stairs of Bartolomé's Summit Trail, which is rewarded with panoramic views (guided walk, moderate level; about 800m/0.5 mi; 114m/375ft altitude difference). Next you can refresh and explore the fantastic shallow water snorkelling spot at the foot of Pinnacle Rock (alternative: walking around or relaxing on the beach).

**PM:** During lunch Nemo I navigates to Chinese Hat (about 1hr), where you can snorkel again. Learn more about the Galapagos' fascinating geology during the late-afternoon walk on this typical volcano-islet (easy level; about 0.7 km/0.5 mi).

**Navigation:** While sailing to Puerto Villamil (Isabela, about 7hr) you will have dinner. We will anchor in the sheltered harbour just after midnight, where you can enjoy a fairly quiet sleep.

**Additional options scuba-diving:** Bartolomé or Cousin Rocks (both advanced)

## **AM: Bartolomé**

The wild romantic volcano islet of Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. Although tiny (only 120ha/300ac) and at first sight lifeless, Bartolomé offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas in the entire archipelago. To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic 'Pinnacle Bay' you have to climb the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114m/375ft). Suddenly enter a dramatic world of threatening (though extinguished) nearby spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets that have been spewed out by fiery fountains. The Summit Trail is also ideal for witnessing how scanty pioneer vegetation such as *lava cactus* struggles to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

From the summit you suddenly face a second, paradisiacal world; the Galapagos' landmark 'Pinnacle Rock' towers prominently over an isthmus with crescent sand beaches on each side, and dunes with evergreen *mangrove* bushes in-between.

Underwater, a third, completely distinctive world opens up to you, resembling a tropical aquarium. Its shallow, clear and warm waters are ideal for snorkelling between *coral-grinding parrot fishes*, shoals of *surgeonfishes*, harmless *whitetip reef sharks* and *Pacific green turtles*. If you are lucky you might even catch the sight of fishing *Galapagos penguins*.

## **PM: Chinese Hat**

Chinese Hat is a 52m/170ft high volcanic cone, forming another islet right out of the rocky coast of Santiago, where a small colony of *Galapagos penguins* has settled. Approaching Chinese Hat from the north, you will certainly agree with its name. Because its primordial fire has been extinguished recently, this is an excellent place to learn more about volcanism, lava bombs and lava tunnels. On the beach you can also find curious pillow-type lavas with *coral heads* on top! These spheres have a submarine origin before being lifted above sea level.

But Chinese Hat does not appear that inhospitable any more than the almost virgin Bartolomé and lunatic Sullivan Bay. You arrive just in time to witness how this barren islet gets colonised by pioneer species and begins to sprout! Beaches of white coral sand grow, and holes in the eroding lava fields are filled up with lava sand, which enables rooting. *Galapagos sea lions* and countless *marine iguanas* contribute to fertilisation. This all together create more favourable options for newcomers, like *saltbush* and the discolouring *sesuvium* carpet. Colonisation of Chinese Hat can occur in a much higher pace than elsewhere, hence Santiago is just a stone's throw away.

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## **Day 7 – Thursday**

**This cruise itinerary ends in Puerto Ayora. En route to the airport you will pass the lush highlands of Santa Cruz, where you will get the opportunity to look for the most famous representatives of the Galapagos: a wild population of *Galapagos giant tortoises*.**

### **Programme:**

**AM:** After an early breakfast it's time to say goodbye and to leave the yacht. You will travel by inflatable dinghy and private bus from the pier of Puerto Ayora into the highlands. In the agricultural zone you can see *Galapagos giant tortoises* in the wild before continuing to the airport.

### **AM: Highlands (Santa Cruz)**

Because wild *Galapagos giant tortoises* don't stop at official National Park boundaries, dozens of them also roam – and even mate – on the adjacent woodlands in the populated agricultural zone of Santa Cruz. Thanks to their concentrations around their favourite muddy pools, these semi-open pastures and moist *scalesia*-woodlands are the best place for a quick visit. Armed with a rain poncho and (provided) rubber boots you will get good chances of approaching wild *Galapagos giant tortoises* within just a few metres! Their dome-shaped shells characterise the Santa Cruz subspecies.

Most of their long lives is spent slowly and silently, except for a warning hiss, or loud screams during mating, which can be heard from far in the first half of the year. Subsequently females leave the highlands and descend all the way down to the beaches to dig holes and lay their eggs. It is estimated that in 2015 about 32,000 tortoises lived in the wild on all the islands, mostly on restricted locations of Isabela.

### **AM: Transfer to Baltra airport**

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crew members the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle. Your guide will accompany you to the check-in counters in the departure hall.

**We fully expect you will to return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable lifelong memories!**